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联合国教育、
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Message from Ms Irina Bokova

Director-General of UNESCO

on the occasion of the International Literacy Day

8 September 2012

This year, International Literacy Day has a special focus on the fundamental relationship between Literacy and Peace.

This has tremendous relevance in our current turbulent times. Countries with patterns of violence have some of the lowest literacy rates in the world. Conflict remains one of the major barriers to the attainment of the Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Conflict-affected countries are home to over 40% of the world's out-of-school population of primary school age.

We must not allow conflict to deprive children and adults of the crucial opportunity of literacy. Literacy is a fundamental human right, and the foundation of all education and lifelong learning. Literacy transforms the lives of people, allowing them to make informed choices and empowering individuals to become agents of change. Lasting peace depends on the development of literate citizenship and access to education for all. Amidst political upheaval and escalating violence in many parts of the world, literacy must be a priority in the peace-building agenda of all nations.

Peace and sustainable development are interdependent, and it is crucial for the two to develop and strengthen simultaneously. Literacy is also a development accelerator, enabling societies to grow more inclusively and sustainably. Literacy programmes can become a key component of future development strategies, opening new opportunities and skills for all. All of this is vital to achieving Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals.

Progress has been made toward reaching the 2015 targets for literacy, but formidable challenges remain ahead. These challenges need to be met with stronger international resolve, if we are to deliver on the promises made in Dakar in 2000. UNESCO estimates that the global adult illiterate population stands at 775 million, while there are still 122 million illiterate youth worldwide. Women and girls make up nearly two thirds of the illiterate adult and youth population. Great potential is being lost.

We can end this cycle of exclusion. We all have a shared interest in ensuring that the world becomes a more literate place. As we approach the Education for All deadline in 2015, we have gained new momentum. UNESCO has worked tirelessly to place education and literacy at the top of the global development agenda. The United Nations Secretary-General's "Education First" initiative, to be officially launched later this month, shall be a strong advocacy platform at the highest level.

The winners of this year's UNESCO International Literacy Prizes demonstrate how successful literacy programmes can achieve outstanding results. They are living examples of the central role of literacy in promoting human rights, gender equality, conflict resolution and cultural diversity.

Today, I call upon stakeholders at all levels to strengthen partnerships that will accelerate quality literacy provision. It is essential that literacy programmes incorporate the values of peace, human rights and civic values, if literacy is to become a true means of empowerment. It can be the harbinger of peace and development. Let us make this happen, together and faster.

Irina Bokova